



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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THE USE OF PUNISHMENT IN EDUCATION.*

A Paper read before the Hastings and St. Leonard's Branch.

LET me preface my paper with a request—that it may not be regarded by you as a sermon, but as a brief introduction to a discussion in the course of which I hope to see my utterances supplemented, corrected and, if need be, controverted.

A great thinker has said :—"The management of children, more especially the *moral* management of children, is lamentably bad. Parents either never think about the matter at all or else their conclusions are crude and inconsistent. In most cases, and especially on the part of mothers, the treatment adopted on every occasion is that which the impulse of the moment prompts. It springs not from any reasoned-out conviction as to what will most benefit the child, but merely expresses the dominant parental feeling, whether good or ill, and varies from hour to hour as these feelings vary. Or, if the dictates of passion are supplemented by any definite doctrines and methods, they are those handed down from the past, or those suggested by the remembrances of childhood, or those adopted by nurses and servants—methods devised, not by the enlightenment, but by the ignorance of the time."

If this be still the case (and I fear that to some extent it is), the consideration of one of the methods of moral education may not be unprofitable and I would ask you to bear with me while I draw your attention to the "use of punishment in education."

Let us take this to mean (1) The utility of punishment in education, (2) The employment of punishment in education; in other words, let us regard our subject in theory and in practice.

Punishment has been variously regarded as retributive, protective or educational.

The retributive idea of punishment originates in the primitive instinct of revenge for a personal injury, and finds its expression in the maxim, "an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth," in the punishment of crimes of violence; while, for offences against the moral law, the vengeance of an angry God or his priestly deputy must be appeased by fines or sacrifices—every wrong

* [Discussion is invited.—ED.]

deed calls for the infliction of a penalty, which may even be paid vicariously and the ends of so-called justice thereby attained—as the case of the princes whose juvenile offences were visited upon the official "whipping boy."

Another view of punishment is that it is a means of protecting the family and the community against a repetition of the wrong-doing. "Chastise thy son and hold him to labour lest his lewd behaviour be an offence to thee."

The infliction of punishment for the good of the offender, instead of the gratification of the offended or the protection of possible future sufferers, is now generally recognised as the more rational aspect of punishment, and is the only view of it with which we, as educationalists, are now concerned.

A child's actions are, roughly speaking, determined along the lines of least resistance—"Pain his aversion, pleasure his desire." Any single act may be prompted by a wish to gratify one of his senses or to satisfy his curiosity, vanity or other natural feeling. He continues to act thus or otherwise according as he finds the result of his action pleasurable or the reverse. The burned child dreads the fire, and the child who benefits directly by telling a lie is encouraged to repeat his offence on the next suitable occasion. The immediate result of many bad actions is gratifying to the young sinner. The temptation to repeat the action is strengthened by the memory of the associated pleasure and the bad act soon becomes a bad habit.

To prevent the formation of bad habits is one of the chief ends of moral training. For this purpose we may exhibit incentives to the frequent performance of the contrary good actions, or we may take care that bad actions are closely associated in the child's mind with sensations of an unpleasant character, by the recollection of which he will, consciously or unconsciously, be helped to withstand future temptation to similar ill-doing. Either method is available. The combination of both is usually necessary and sometimes (alas) ineffective.

The use, then, of punishment in the education of the young may be thus shortly expressed, viz.: To associate in the child's mind the memory of a bad action with that of certain unpleasant results of that action, in order to counteract any

pleasurable association, and thereby to prevent the repetition of the action and the formation of a habit. In other words, to influence directly the child's will in its choice of actions—to supply him with a motive.

It may be urged that fear of punishment is not a high motive, that love of right for its own sake is the motive we should do well to inculcate. I acknowledge the ethical superiority of the latter motive, but doubt its adequacy in the present case.

The average child is not capable of appreciating the beauty of goodness to a degree which will enable us to dispense entirely with the adjuvant stimulus supplied by fear of punishment. Ask yourselves, how many adults, even, could afford to do without the many legal and social restraints which tend to keep them straight, and without which society would soon become demoralised?

I have no need to remind you that one article of the Decalogue is accompanied by a threat, another by a promise—that material rewards and punishments were held forth to the Chosen People as inducements to well-doing and were, doubtless, of more effect in compelling obedience than a request to contemplate the Abstract Beauty of Holiness.

Many undesirable actions are naturally accompanied or followed by speedy discomfort which a child logically associates with the action, and the memory of which is a sufficient deterrent therefrom. A little friend of mine who had suffered from eating an unripe plum, seeing his sister with a couple of similar plums in her hand, said, "I ate a plum yesterday and had a pain. If you eat those you will have two pains."

The evil effects of many delinquencies are more remote than the consequences attending upon an infraction of the laws of diet. They are unperceived by the child, and even if explained to him are but dimly conceived. His infant imagination is not equal to the task of picturing the remote effects of his actions on the bodily and mental condition of himself and his fellows. Such knowledge as we can impart to him of the ultimate result of his bad conduct is apt to have far less deterrent effect than the remembered discomfort invariably associated with, and following closely upon, a certain act.

That "the way of transgressors is hard" is finally acknowledged by all who travel therein. That its hardness,

however, may not be (and usually is not) apparent to the traveller till he has gone so far up on the road as to make the retracing of his path a matter of considerable difficulty is the subject of one of the most hackneyed quotations from the classics. It is our duty to our children not only to erect sign-posts and danger-boards, but to bar the way if necessary with barbed wire entanglements so as to make it in its early stages too difficult to be pleasant.

Having shortly explained the utility of punishment in education, let me direct your attention to the methods of its employment. To ensure the ready association in a child's mind of the fault and its penalty, it is necessary that the latter should be—

Prompt. For events following in quick succession naturally tend to be mentally associated and regarded as cause and effect.

Certainty of punishment is indispensable to success. A small but inevitable punishment is far more effectual than one of greater severity but uncertain incidence. Indeed it would almost appear that the chance of escaping punishment may sometimes act as an incentive to the commission of the fault. A certain amount of risk adds to the piquancy of the action. A boy who would not incur the certainty of an "imposition," will risk a flogging as cheerfully as he would risk the loss of half-a-crown in a Derby sweepstake, trusting in both cases to his luck. A code of punishments of Draconic severity is never administered with rigidity and is therefore ineffective.

The award of ill-doing should be just, free from all trace of vindictiveness and apportioned to the moral value of the offence, not to its result. Thus, a boy who disobediently uses a catapult in the garden is equally guilty whether he breaks the kitchen window or not; unless, indeed, the damage is intentional, and wanton mischief is thereby added to disobedience. The girl who picks her mother's choice flowers to give to a sick friend is less guilty than one who takes them for her own selfish gratification. In all cases the intention of the offender should be taken into consideration when awarding punishment.

Children are quick to detect an injustice and the resentful feelings aroused by it far outweigh any good to be expected from the penalty. On the other hand *justice* is always duly

recognised, even when the offender is smarting under it. You all remember the boy who made answer to an enquirer that "Temple was a beast, but he was a *just* beast."

Promptness and certainty in its infliction and justice in its award are the chief factors in the efficiency of punishment and will go far to render its frequent use unnecessary and its methods mild, so that our discipline will be described as speedy, sure, and gentle.

What are the means of punishment at our disposal? First, for slight offences, deprivation of some of the rewards which usually follow the average performance of children's duties, *e.g.*, in the case of a young child, some curtailment of the time spent in his mother's society or the taking away for a certain time the little duties which he regards as privileges. In the case of a schoolboy, loss of good conduct marks or of pocket-money. For more serious offences we inflict some bodily or mental pain or discomfort. It is in the use of such means that the greatest care and discrimination should be exercised. Regard should be had to the nature of the offence as well as to the age, sex, and disposition of the offender. Acts of negligence, unpunctuality, slight infractions of family rules, merit of course less reproof than offences against the moral code. But even minor offences should be treated with some severity if by frequent repetition they tend to become habitual rather than occasional. The heinous nature of such offences as theft, lying, swearing, &c., having been once explained to a child and emphasized by suitable mild correction, their repetition should be visited with far greater severity.

It is sometimes possible, and when possible I think advisable, to make the punishment appeal to and mortify those feelings which prompted the commission of the offence; *e.g.*, gluttony may be punished by deprivation, for a time, of some of the pleasures of the table—I mean, of course, of its luxuries, not of its necessities. A child may be corrected by being made to go without dessert, or by being given less tasteful food, but he should never be deprived of sufficient nourishing food on account of his greediness any more than he should be deprived of his clothing as a check to his vanity, though in the latter case the substitution of older garments for those of which he had made a display would be allowable.

A little girl was rude to her nurse, saying, "*I* am a young lady, *you* are only a servant." It was explained to the child that all men were equal before God. That work was honourable, and that a good nurse was a person of far greater use in the world than a foolish little girl. An apology was called for and punishment inflicted, *viz.*, that the arrogant young lady was to clean the nurse's Sunday boots. This I am glad to say was cheerfully done, the child recognising the fitness of the task as a means of expressing her repentance for her exhibition of pride.

I may here remark that a child's sense of self-esteem may often be made use of with good result. A small child lately promoted to knickerbockers had been repeatedly punished for an habitual fault without the least improvement in his behaviour. Mild corporal chastisement his manly spirit despised. The withholding of his customary weekly penny only drew from him the remark that he "did not want the dirty penny." His rehabilitation in petticoats till such time as he could "behave like a big boy" was speedily followed by a reformation.

In our efforts to make "the punishment fit the crime" we may, when practicable, allow the child to suffer the natural results of his bad behaviour. A boy who by carelessness spoils his clothes should not be given new ones till a reasonable time for their normal "wearing out" has elapsed, so that by reason of his shabby appearance he will be unable to participate in any social functions where smartness of apparel is required. He will thus learn by experience the need of care for the future. Similarly a child who has not "got ready" in time for a little excursion should not be waited for, but should be left behind. He will learn a lesson in punctuality which will be useful in after life. Again, wilful damages to a playmate's toys, books, &c., should be made good by the perpetrator of the mischief from his own belongings. A friend of mine who found her two little sons furtively enjoying clay pipes and tobacco, invited them into the dining-room and bade them continue their indulgence in the fragrant weed. It is needless to add that in a short time they were heartily sick of it in more senses than one. A small child who uses his finger-nails as weapons of offence may be punished by

wearing gloves in the nursery. The discomfort and disgrace will make him remember the reason for the penalty.

We must not forget that a child's temperament often predisposes it to a particular kind of fault. Allowance should be made for this in awarding punishment. An angry word or a blow given under provocation by an impulsive child is less culpable than the same word or blow given in a more deliberate manner by a naturally more self-controlled youngster. The difference is the same in kind as that which separates manslaughter and murder, and calls for similar recognition.

A timid child may err in the direction of disobedience by being too nervous, under certain circumstances, to obey directions, or he may almost involuntarily be driven to falsehood by fear of punishment. Such children require careful and sympathetic handling. They are generally children of quick intelligence and are more amenable to quiet reasoning and friendly advice than to hasty and ill-considered correction.

I do not share in the present clamour for the abolition of corporal punishment, though I would restrict its application to boys and very young girls. It should of course be of sufficient severity to "leave a good impression behind" without inflicting any real harm. Blows on the head and random strokes of the cane should be eschewed as dangerous.

The use of corporal punishment should I think be exceptional, not, as was once the case, universal. It should be administered calmly, in cold blood, after a thorough investigation of the offence, and with due regard to age, sex, and temperament of the offender. We differ so much in our mental and physical appreciation of pain that the same punishment will mean much to one boy, nothing to another. I fully endorse the opinion of Dr. Arnold, who retained corporal punishment on principle for younger boys "as fitly answering to, and marking the naturally inferior state of boyhood, and, therefore, as conveying no particular degradation to persons in such a state." He reserved it for *grave* offences and, in reply to the argument that it was, even for these offences and this age, degrading, wrote: "I know well of what feeling this is the expression. It originates in that proud notion of personal independence which is neither reasonable nor Christian, but essentially barbarian. . . . At an age when it is impossible

to find a truly manly sense of the degradation of guilt or faults, where is the wisdom of encouraging a fantastic sense of the degradation of personal correction? What can be more false, or more adverse to the simplicity, sobriety, and humbleness of mind which are the best ornaments of youth and the best promise of a noble manhood?" Such punishment has the advantage of avoiding the risk of injury to health and spirits, which the alternative confinements and impositions (of sufficient degree) might endanger. Boys recognise its reasonableness. It is their own method of punishing an offender. Nor do they harbour resentment. A young man to whom I was once speaking, exclaimed on the approach of an elderly friend of his and mine, "Here comes dear old — He's a right-down good fellow. Many's the licking I had from him when I was a youngster."

While recognising the educational value of punishment, let us not over-estimate it. No child is made good by punishment alone any more than a man is made virtuous by act of Parliament. If it were so what angels some of us would be! No. Education should be a process of leading and driving, and the more patiently and skilfully the former is managed the less the latter will be required, though I doubt whether it can ever be entirely eliminated from our schools and nurseries.

Let us then regard punishment, on our part, as a painful but necessary duty, "not to be taken in hand lightly or wantonly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God, duly considering the causes for which it was ordained," trusting that if we undertake it in the right spirit we shall be guided in its due performance. Let no morbid sentimentality deter us from this duty. Let us not delude ourselves with the idea that we are tenderhearted and kind when we are only shirking what is repugnant to our morbid æstheticism and really cruel to those committed to our care. If we act with calmness and make it evident that our anger is against the offence rather than the offender, that the infliction of pain is as distasteful to us as to the culprit, we shall (though no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous) deserve, and ultimately obtain, the gratitude of our children who, even at an early age, will recognise the justice and reasonableness of our action. A little girl of six,

whose love for her father was above question, remarked to a friend, "Daddy has to punish us sometimes, you know, 'cos if he didn't we might grow up naughty."

Above all let us be mindful that the relation in which we stand to our children is that in which we ourselves stand before the "All-Father." That He is just but merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. Let us remember that there are occasions when justice should be tempered with mercy, and that the same forgiveness should be extended to the penitent as we hope to obtain.

Finally, let me supplement these few and imperfect remarks of my own with a short poem of Coventry Patmore's, which aptly phrases the dual condition of fatherhood and childhood in which we mortals find ourselves. It is entitled "The Toys":—

"My little Son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
Having my law the seventh time disobeyed,
I struck him, and dismiss'd
With hard words and unkiss'd,
His mother, who was patient, being dead.
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed,
But found him slumbering deep,
With darkened eyelids, and their lashes yet
From his late sobbing wet.
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with blue-bells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.
So when that night I pray'd
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood
Thy great commanded good,
Then, Fatherly not less
Than I, whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'"

J. W. B.

FACILITIES OF MODERN PIANO TEACHING.

BY MISS ELSA ASHBEE.

OF all the arts, music has taken the longest to develop, and music is still in its infancy. It is only during the last 500 years that music has been making real progress, progress which has advanced with a constant acceleration. It is the most universal and complicated of the arts, and through its subtlety speaks a language of the human soul which neither poetry nor the plastic arts can ever reach.

A really fine player has had an education which develops mental qualities far more than most educations, for his success, even when he has the musical mind, is impossible without enormous concentration, intelligence and will power, continual care of detail, endless patience, and a fine physique. What a gigantic field for the teacher to work on to ensure his pupil's success. It is obvious, therefore, that musical education must begin very young and that the teacher must have an adequate grasp of the psychology of the child mind.

In striving for an ideal piano performance, what is it that we really aim at? Soul, touch, facility, accuracy, are perhaps the most salient features and in the order in which they strike us. *Soul* comprises comprehension of the composer's meaning in its very fullest sense. *Touch* the sympathetic expression of his ideas. *Facility* and *accuracy* the mechanical conveyance of them to the audience.

The principles on which I teach technique I can classify under two heads, namely, "make haste slowly," and never leave a difficulty till it has become so easy as to be second nature.

The mental attributes developed by a musical education, as I stated above, are concentration, intelligence, will power, continual care of detail, patience, and a fine physique.

Now which of these, and how, is technique going to develop them?